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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the term bourgeois liberalization and describes how it is used by the Chinese government as a label for unwanted U.S. influences. The discussion is based on a review of literature about the Chinese government and a written survey of student opinions at Northern Jiaotong University (Beijing). The Chinese government officially defines bourgeois liberalization as "negating the socialist system in favour of capitalism." The Chinese media consistently emphasizes that the modernization of China must be done in accordance with the four cardinal principles of: (1) maintaining the socialist position; (2) upholding the peoples' democratic dictatorship; (3) maintaining the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party; and (4) upholding Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought. A student survey indicated an increased usage of the term bourgeois liberalization. Although 57 percent of the students felt bourgeois liberalization ideals are becoming more common because of increased trade with the United States, only seven percent believed that the best way to eradicate bourgeois liberalization is to cease trade or interaction with the United States. Study of bourgeois liberalization provides an opportunity to better understand how one culture has chosen to deal with such a conflict. (Author/SM)

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BOURGEOIS LIBERALIZATION: THE LABELING OF UNWANTED AMERICAN INFLUENCES BY THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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A B S T R A C T

BOURGEOIS LIBERALIZATION: THE LABELING OF UNWANTED AMERICAN INFLUENCES BY THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

In 1979, after being a closed society for 30 years, the People's Republic of China initiated economic, technological, and educational reforms. The opening of China has involved the importation of western technologies and, to the dismay of the Chinese government, western values and ideals. The adoption of these values, which are primarily recognized as originating in the U.S., has been labeled as "bourgeois liberalization" by the Chinese government. The author spent three months on a teaching/research assignment in Beijing and collecteddata (through reviews of literature and a written survey of university students) to better understand this labeling of unwanted American influences.

BOURGEOIS LIBERALIZATION: THE LABELING OF UNWANTED AMERICAN INFLUENCES BY THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

In 1979, after being closed to the outside world for 30 years, the People's Republic of China reversed its policy of isolation by initiating a variety of economic, political, cultural, and educational reforms. The primary objective behind these reforms has been to modernize China and help it compete in the world market. Roughly one-fourth of the world population lives in China. The modernization of such a large country has involved a variety of obstacles.

One such obstacle has centered on how to import western technologies without importing western lifestyles. Increased interaction with the U.S. best exemplifies this situation. The People's Republic of China is a socialist society, governed by a communist party, and the U.S. is a capitalist society governed as a democracy. Thus, the Chinese government is in a situation where it can benefit greatly from foreign interaction but stands to have its cultural values affected in major ways if this interaction is left unchecked.

The opening of China is a complex situation. It is comprised of a variety of cultures which date back thousands of years. An ironic contradiction to the Chinese way of life is the existence of Hong Kong in the south. Hong Kong, which is governed by England, is connected geographically but is miles apart ideologically. Hong Kong is very developed

as a capitalist power in the world market. In the late 1990's, China will recover jurisdiction of Hong Kong and Macao (a similar type of capitalist area currently governed by Portugal) and will be faced with the question of what to do with its control of two successful capitalist protectorates.

The current plan is for China to allow Hong Kong to keep its capitalist system for at least 50 years. This approach, referred to as "one country, two systems" will provide a testing ground for the acquisition of Macao and the intended acquisition of Taiwan. The recovering of Hong Kong is vaguely described by the Chinese government. "To keep Hong Kong's system unchanged, it is imperative to maintain socialism with China's characteristics under the leadership of the Communist Party" (No Change..., p. 5).

The Chinese government has a sensitive task to deal with. How to praise (and adopt the developments practiced by) countries which have ideological perspectives which are contradictory to those of China. The situation presents an ideological tightrope where the Chinese government must concurrently praise and condemn.

It is obvious, even to the casual observer visiting China, American values have found their way onto the Chinese landscape. American music, western clothing, and the rampant popularity of the english language attest to such developments in the popular culture. As the Chinese people embrace American technology they also seem to be

embracing the American way of life. The Chinese government has labeled this negative practice as "bourgeois liberalization."

The author spent three months in Beijing (March-June, 1987) and frequently heard this expression, or saw it in the media, but rarely could find a clear definition of it. Otherwise articulate individuals would become somewhat puzzled and confused when asked to define it. Like pornography, they could not clearly define it but they knew it when they saw it.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the term "bourgeois liberalization" and describe how it was used by the Chinese government as a label for unwanted American influences. This discussion will be based on a review of literature written by and about the Chinese government and a written survey of student opinions at Northern Jiaotong University (located in Beijing) where the author was a visiting professor (March-June, 1987).

In September, 1986, the Chinese government issued a document entitled Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPC on the Guiding Principles for Building a Socialist Society with an Advanced Culture and Ideology. This official document defines bourgeois liberalization as "negating the socialist system in favour of capitalism" and goes on to say it "is in total contradiction of the people's interests and to the historical trend, and it is therefore firmly opposed by the masses" (Resolution of the Central

Committee, p. 13).

The Chinese media consistently emphasizes the modernization of China must be done in accordance with the "four cardinal principles." The principles are "keeping to the socialist road, upholding the people's democratic dictatorship, upholding the leadership of the Communist party, and upholding Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought" (Resolution of the Central Committee, p. 4). The frequent emphasis on these principles by the Chinese government cannot be overemphasized.

China is eager to open to the outside world, but only on its own terms. The following paragraph provides a description of these terms.

> Closing one's country to external contact results only in stagnation and backwardness. We resolutely reject the capitalist ideological and social systems that defend oppression and exploitation, and we reject all the ugly and decadent aspects of capitalism. Nevertheless, we should do our utmost to learn from all countries . . . . Otherwise, we shall remain ignorant and be unable to modernize our own country. (Resolution of the Central Committee, p. 6)

This proposed objective is uniquely referred to as "socialism with Chinese characteristics".

China's embracing of American technology exemplifies a love-hate relationship with the American culture. Zhao

Ziyang, Premier of the State Council, underscores this situation in his Report on the Work of the Government. "Opening to the outside world is a basic policy of our state . . . . In 1987 we shall open wider to the outside world and explore new possibilities for the effective use of foreign funds, the import of advanced technology and the earning of foreign exchange through export (Ziyang, p. 25).

Deng Xiaoping, shortly before stepping down as the leader of China, stated a similar view. "The nation should emerge from its long-term seclusion and open itself to the outside world, because its development needs overseas capital, advanced technology and management expertise" (Deng's Book Draws Lessons . . ., p. 4).

While praising interaction with the west on the one hand, Chinese leadership sharply warns of the dangers of adopting western values on the other hand. "We must not unthinkingly praise these western things, still less regard the decadent capitalist values and outlook on life as 'new ideas' and disseminate them as such. Otherwise, they will contaminate and corrupt peoples minds" (Ziyang, p. 34).

Examples of negative western influences are frequently cited in the Chinese press. Some of these examples point to the corruption of youth, increased crime, the degeneration of literature, and misunderstandings in the universities.

Interaction with the west has been interpreted as both a problem and an opportunity for the youth of China.

China Daily reported "the motive for most crimes was money or sex oriented and that youth and juvenile delinquents were responsible for most of the cases" (Lixin, p. 1). The report goes on to say "Bourgeois lifestyles and publicity given to violence and crimes through films, television, pictorals and magazines stimulated teenagers to go astray" (Lixin, p. 1).

An interesting contrast to viewing western influences is provided in an article entitled "A New Way to Teach." This article describes how interaction with the west is changing the teaching of children.

> In the past we tried to mold children into ones who were not used to using their minds. But we cannot afford to do it to today's children, because they will enter a world full of competition. They have to be prepared to use their own "questioning minds." (Xing, p. 5)

Zheng Tianxiang, president of the Supreme People's Court, emphasizes the need to combat western influences to curb crime. He suggests "intensifying publicity about various laws and education in morality, ideals, discipline, and general knowledge, along with the efforts to resist all decadent and ugly aspects of capitalism" (Zhongshi, p. 1)

Bourgeois liberalization has been blamed for literary problems such as rejecting the leadership of the Communist party, divorcing art from politics and the encouragement of "sex literature." China Daily reports "Many talented young

writers have been going astray and producing bad books due to the influence of bourgeois liberalization" (In Literary Circles, p. 4).

A warning to writers was noted in April, 1987. Zhang Xianliang, a leader of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, stated the "struggle against bourgeois liberalization will make Chinese writers 'politically more mature, better able to understand life and more perceptive to reality'" (Struggle Makes Writers . . ., p. 1.). He goes on to say "Generally speaking, it is good to have time to reflect, which helps the writers turn out better works" (Struggle Makes Writers, . .,p. 1).

Six weeks later, in an article entitled "Guidelines For Literature," misguided writers were taken to task for their "incorrect ways." "Some writers, however, have forgotten their social responsibilities . . . spreading corrupt ideas, blindly worshipping foreign cultures and copying foreign things mechanically. This has been resented and criticized by the masses" (Danchen, p. 4).

Zhao Ziyang's Report on the Work of the Government stresses the necessary struggle against bourgeois liberalization. "If bourgeois liberalization were allowed to spread unchecked, it would adversely affect even more people -- especially a part of the young people -- who would lose their bearings, and it would plunge our country into turmoil . . . ." (Ziyang, p. 28). He concludes by saying "We must take a firm, clear-cut stand in relation

to this struggle and never hesitate or waver" (Ziyang, p. 28).

The most widely publicized aspect of the campaign against bourgeois liberalization resulted after the pro-democratic student demonstrations which occurred in December, 1986. Key leaders of the movement were criticized for their actions and the protests were dismissed as misguided youthful exuberance. Yet the opening of China continues to pose problems on the campuses.

Robert L. Jacobsen, a writer for the Chronicle of Higher Education, wrote a series of reports on higher education in China. Regarding the opening of China, and its effects on campuses, Jacobsen quotes a group interview he conducted.

> "Once you open your society," says one of China's more progressive university leaders, "you cannot close it again." But on hearing that, another official at the same institution retorts "I've always believed that when you come to a turn in the road, you have to slow down." (Jacobsen, p. 42)

Chinese leaders do not underestimate the influence of student protesters since many of them were once student protesters.

In April, 1987 the author surveyed the opinions of a class of graduate students he taught at Northern Jiaotong University in Beijing. The survey dealt with the development and meaning of bourgeois liberalization. Fourteen students

anonymously participated in the survey and their ages ranged between 24-26. The following table indicates their views on specific areas.

SA - strongly agree A - agree N - neutral D - disagree SD - strongly disagree

1 Bourgeois liberalization is reflective of western influences.

SA 7% A 36% N 21% D 36% SD

2 Bourgeois liberalization is more reflective of U.S. influences than any other country.

SA 7% A 21% N 29% D 29% SD 14%

3 Usage of bourgeois liberalization has become common within the last six months.

SA 50% A 43% N 7% D SD

4 Bourgeois liberalization ideals can be found in clothing.

SA A 7% N D 64% SD 29%

5 Bourgeois liberalization ideals can be found in dancing.

SA A 14% N 7% D 65% SD 14%

6 Bourgeois liberalization ideals can be found in music.

SA A 7% N 7% D 57% SD 29%

7 Bourgeois liberalization ideals can be found in literature.

SA A 72% N 14% D 7% SD 7%

8 Bourgeois liberalization ideals are becoming more common because of increased trade with the U.S.

SA A 57% N 29% D 14% SD

9 The best way to eradicate bourgeois liberalization ideals is to cease trade/interaction with the U.S.

SA A 7% N 7% D 36% SD 50%

10 If unchecked, bourgeois liberalization can become a serious problem in the People's Republic of China.

SA A 72% N 14% D 14% SD

11 Bourgeois liberalization means "negating the socialist system in favor of capitalism."

SA 7% A 43% N 29% D 14% SD 7%

The survey provided a unique opportunity to solicit student views on a sensitive subject. Opportunities to collect such data are far less common in China, compared to the U.S., due to the social/political climate.

The survey indicates an increased usage of the term bourgeois liberalization in the six month period prior to the survey (question #3). Bourgeois liberalization is far more evident in literature (question #7) than in other forms of expression such as clothing, dancing, and music (questions #4, #5, and #6).

Oddly enough, 57% felt bourgeois liberalization ideals are becoming more common because of increased trade with the U.S. (29% were neutral) but only seven percent felt the best way to eradicate bourgeois liberalization is to cease trade/interaction with the U.S. (7% were neutral). These areas are covered in questions #8 and #9. Seventy-two percent agree (14% were neutral) that if left unchecked bourgeois liberalization can become a serious problem in the People's Republic of China (question #10).

Interpretation of the survey responses must be done

in light of the fact an American was collecting the information. Although their names were not connected with their responses they did know the author would be interpreting their responses. Aside from their possible reticence to share their thoughts with a foreigner they may have modified their views so they would not be offensive.

The media and students are readily aware of bourgeois liberalization and its possible effects in China but nobody seems to want any major crackdown similar to that experienced during the cultural revolution. The lessons of those years (1966-1976) seem to be too painfully recent to risk a similar situation. Perhaps this explains why only seven percent of students surveyed supported the ceasing of trade/interaction with the U.S. as a means of eradicating bourgeois liberalization.

The fears of any reaction against bourgeois liberalization which might resemble the cultural revolution period are evidenced in the press. Newsweek quotes a confidential party directive as saying "the party leadership urged communists not to allow their campaign against 'bourgeois liberalization'--meaning western influences--to degenerate into personal vendettas against other party members" (The Long Shadow of Mao, p. 40).

Chinese leader Zhao Ziyang, in his Report on the Work of the Government, stated "No attempt will be made to ferret out exponents of bourgeois liberalization at various levels, to implicate people at higher or lower levels or

to have everybody make self-criticisms" (Ziyang, p. 30). He has emphasized "no 'cultural revolution' type political campaigns would be launched" (On Student Unrest, p. 24).

A new phase evolved in August, 1987 which is an interesting follow-up to bourgeois liberalization. Newsweek reported "editorials that recently attacked bourgeois liberalization now denounce 'ossified thinking'--a code phrase for positions that undercut Deng" (Deng Xiaoping's reforms) (Deng's Balancing Act, p. 3). Ironically, the term bourgeois liberalization was coined to oppose reform and "ossified thinking" was coined to promote reform. Governmental usage of such vague terms must surely be confusing for one who is trying to abide by the party line.

The opening of China provides a variety of opportunities for China to develop economically, technologically, educationally, and culturally. Similarly it offers western countries, such as the U.S., opportunities to expand in the same types of areas. Such development and expansion can be beneficial but there is bound to be integration which creates conflict. Study of bourgeois liberalization provides an additional opportunity to better understand how one culture has chosen to deal with such a conflict.

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